

## **Tai Chi to be offered at the YMCA of Greater Westfield**

For most folks exercise implies some sort of vigorous and often times strenuous movement that typically increases both one's heart and breathing rate. Zumba, running or playing basketball certainly would qualify. Yet, there exists a form of exercise known for its exceedingly slow, controlled movements, which has been shown under rigorous scientific studies, to have a powerful effect on health. That exercise is Tai Chi, developed in ancient China and practiced over the centuries worldwide for its defensive training and health benefits. The literal translation of Tai Chi Chuan is "Supreme Ultimate Fist", owing to its martial art origination.

The central premise in Tai Chi is to integrate the mind with the body through fluid movement; control of breathing and mental concentration. The ongoing practice of Tai Chi is thought to enable qi or life force to flow powerfully and smoothly within the body. Researchers conducting studies on intensive tai chi have found that it promotes balance, flexibility, muscular strength, cardiovascular fitness and has been shown to reduce the risk of falls in both healthy elderly patients and those recovering from chronic stroke. One study found that Tai Chi, in comparison with regular stretching, showed the ability to reduce pain and improve overall physical and mental health in people over 60 with severe osteoarthritis of the knee.(1) Beyond the sheer physical benefits of Tai Chi, a large number of scientific trials have indicated increased psychological well-being, reduction of anxiety, stress, depression and enhanced mood in healthy participants and in those with chronic conditions. The scientific studies continue to demonstrate that Tai Chi is a very effective exercise in increasing overall health.

Recognizing the enormous health benefits of Tai Chi, the YMCA of Greater Westfield will be offering Tai Chi classes beginning this summer. Instructors Rosann Scalise and Ellie D'Allesandro have been trained and certified by the Tai Chi for Health Institute. The Institute was developed by Dr. Paul Lam, a family physician in Sydney, Australia, a Tai Chi teacher since 1976 and a world leader in the field of Tai Chi for health improvement. Several of his Tai Chi for Health programs are supported by foundations around the world, including the Arthritis Foundations in Australia, the US and the UK. In addition to a number of Tai Chi for Health programs that he has developed, Dr. Lam has also authored four books; "Overcoming Arthritis", "Tai Chi for Beginners", "Tai Chi for Diabetes", and "Teaching Tai Chi Effectively". To date, over two million people have learned and benefited from one of his programs.

For the Y, Tai Chi is truly a perfect fit in that it develops the spirit, mind and body. The slow, fluid movements are extremely effective in producing a sense of well-being. Perhaps the conscious effort to slow the pace of one's life through the Tai Chi movements gives practitioners a certain permission to relax and take life in with greater focus and clarity. Moreover, Tai Chi is accessible to most everyone, even those who may be wheelchair bound. One of its appealing attributes is that you never get down on the floor. The movements are all performed standing, or seated for those who may have mobile impairment. It is this wide accessibility that has brought Tai Chi programs to hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers, and town recreation centers. The

demand for it has only increased with the aging Baby Boomer population looking for ways to stay active and fit. Indeed, in today's rapid-paced culture, Tai Chi presents an opportunity for anyone of any age to directly experience how this ancient form of exercise can help harmonize one's body and mind and generate greater well-being.

The Tai Chi for Health program begins this summer. It is suitable for all ages, with this form being particularly helpful for people with arthritis and/or joint problems. Two classes will be held this summer with more classes to be offered in the fall. Each class meets once a week for seven weeks. One class will be held at Stanley Park on Tuesday mornings from 8:15AM-9:00AM, beginning on July 12<sup>th</sup> and running through August 23<sup>rd</sup>. The second class will meet outside the YMCA building on Wednesdays from 12:00PM-12:45PM beginning on July 13<sup>th</sup> and running through August 24<sup>th</sup>. The cost per class is free for YMCA members and \$42.00 for non members. Registration is now occurring at the YMCA located at 67 Court Street in Westfield. For more information, please contact the writer at 413-568-8631 ext 302 or [rscalise@westfieldymca.org](mailto:rscalise@westfieldymca.org).

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Notes: 1: Dunham, Will, October 25, 2008, "Tai Chi helps cut pain of knee arthritis; study," *Reuters*